

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14276

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, TH

SUBJECT: RECENT STUDENT PROTESTS

REF: A. BANGKOK 11430 B. BANGKOK 10140 C. BANGKOK 13941

1. SUMMARY: IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS OF LAST JUNE AND JULY, THE RTG TOOK STEPS TO DAMPEN STUDENT ACTIVISM. STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, DURING THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 3, FOCUSED MAINLY ON THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE APPEARANCE OF VISITING SPEAKERS AT PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES. STUDENT LEADERS FOUND ONLY LIMITED SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITIONS AMONG THE STUDENT BODIES AND CONFINED THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS TO THE CAMPUSES, THUS AVOIDING A SHARP RTG REACTION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS OF LAST JUNE AND JULY (REFS A ANB B), THE RTG DECIDED TO DAMPEN AND ISOLATE STUDENT ACTIVISM. THE RTG INFORMED THE UNIVERSITY RECTORS, AND THUS THE STUDENTS, THAT ANY FURTHER MASS STREET DEMONSTRATIONS WOULD BE SEVERLY DEALT WITH. FURTHERMORE, THE STAE UNIVERSITY BOARD (SUB), AT THE

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CABINET'S DIRECTION "CLARIFIED" THE REGULATIONS CON-

CERNING THE PARTICIPATION OF VISITING SPEAKERS AT STUDENT RALLIES AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS BY PLACING THE FULL RESPONSIBILITY ON INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITY RECTORS FOR DECIDING TO PERMIT OFF-CAMPUS SPEAKERS AND FOR ALLOWING THE PUBLIC TO ATTEND. THE SUB INSTRUCTIONS, ISSUED AUGUST 17, ALSO COMMENTED THAT THE RECTORS SHOULD BE CERTAIN THAT SEMINARS SUPPORTED THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITIES. SPEAKERS FROM OFF-CAMPUS HAVE FREQUENTLY TAKEN THE STUDENTS POINTS OF VIEW, AND ENCOURAGED STUDENT LEADERS IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE RTG ON A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS NOT RELATED TO EDUCATION.

3. BOTH THE RTG AND STUDENT LEADERS EXPECT THAT THIS DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITY WILL RESULT IN A TIGHTENING OF CONTROLS OVER A LONG-USED VEHICLE OF STUDENT DISSENT. THE RECTORS WILL TEND TO BE OVER CAUTIOUS SO AS NOT TO RISK OFFENDING THE RTG BY PERMITTING A PANEL DISCUSSION THAT MIGHT FUEL STUDENT GRIEVANCES.

4. RALLIES AT THAMMASAT AND KASETSART UNIVERSITIES DURING THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 3 ADDRESSED WHAT THE ACTIVISTS AND THE PRESS CALLED THE "BAN" ON OFF-CAMPUS SPEAKERS, IN ADDITION TO COMMENTS REPORTEDLY MADE BY SENATOR GOLDWATER (REF C). THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY KASETSART RECTOR, PRINCE CHAKRAPHAND PENSIRI, THAT HE WOULD ABIDE BY THE SUB INSTRUCTIONS AND "CONTROL" THE STUDENTS, TOUCHED OFF THE DEMONSTRATION OF OVER 2000 STUDENTS. THIS DEMONSTRATION DID NOT, HOWEVER, SPREAD TO OTHER UNIVERSITIES, IN PART BECAUSE OTHER RECTORS HAD NOT COMMENTED PUBLICLY ON THE SUB LETTER. IN FACT, THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT SOME UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS ARE NOT PLEASED WITH THE POSITION IN WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN PLACED. SOME YOUNG FACULTY MEMBERS WHO DISAGREE WITH THE SUB LETTER HAVE EVEN ENCOURAGED STUDENT PROTEST ON THIS ISSUE.

5. OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT THE OFF-CAMPUS SPEAKER ISSUE DID NOT SPARK WIDE STUDENT INTEREST AS RECENT RALLIES DID NOT LAST LONG OR SPREAD. WHILE YOUNGER FACULTY MEMBERS MAY SUPPORT THE STUDENTS ON THIS ISSUE, OTHER NON-STUDENT SUPPORT WAS WEAK DURING

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THE RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS. KUKRIT PRAMOT, JOURNALIST AND FREQUENT GUEST SPEAKER AT THE UNIVERSITIES, WROTE A COLUMN AGREEING WITH THE SUB LETTER AND ASSERTING THAT CAMPUS SEMINARS SHOULD BE KEPT MORE EDUCATIONAL AND LESS CONTROVERSIAL.

6. CONCLUSION: THE STUDENTS SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN SERIOUSLY THE WARNING THAT THE RTG WOULD REACT

TO MASS STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. FOR INSTANCE, THE
CHULALONGKORN STUDENT UNION WITHHELD ITS SUPPORT FROM
THE SEPTEMBER 5 RALLIES. THE POLICE REINFORCED THE
CHULALONGKORN STUDENTS' DECISION BY BLOCKING OFF THE
MAIN EXITS TO PREVENT STUDENTS FROM LEAVING THE CAMPUS
TO JOIN THE RALLY ACROSS TOWN AT THAMMASAT. DESPITE
THEIR COMPLAINTS, STUDENT LEADERS ARE RELUCTANT TO TAKE ACTIONS
WHICH WOULD PROVOKE A STRONG GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND HAVE FOR THE
MOMENT ACCEPTED THE RESTRICTION OF
HOLDING THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS ONLY ON CAMPUSES.
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